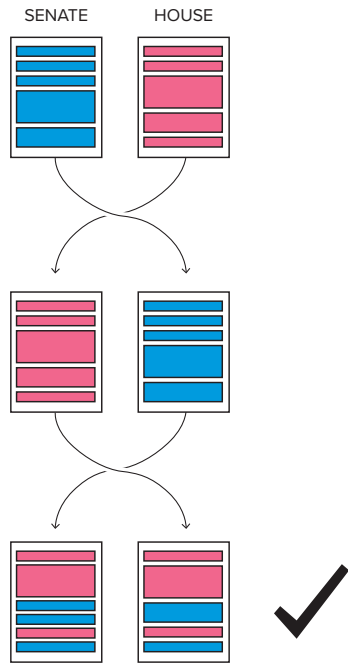


June 13, 2017

How the House and Senate Settle Legislative Differences

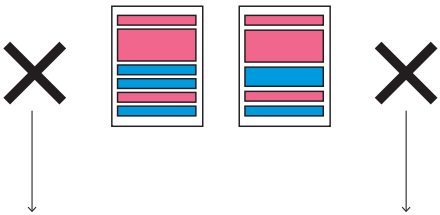
Each chamber must approve the same bill before it can be sent to the president. In a majority of cases, the second chamber simply approves the one approved by the first, and it is presented to the president for signature. If there are differences, there are two options for compromise. Historically, most major bills are resolved in conference committee, though the two chambers may also exchange amendments, or both. For example, they might agree to immediately go to conference and then resolve any remaining differences with an amendment exchange. Or they may first attempt to exchange amendments and then decide to go to conference.

To expedite the amendment exchange process, a senator and a representative will initially introduce identical or similar versions of a bill in each chamber. If one passes, the other chamber could act on that bill, but usually considers its own first and then acts on the other, substituting its preferred language into the other chamber's version and sending it back.



The chambers keep sending it back and forth — called “amendments between the houses,” or “amendment exchange,” or “pingpong” — until one chamber ultimately approves the other’s version. Each chamber may only amend the other’s amendments once.

OR

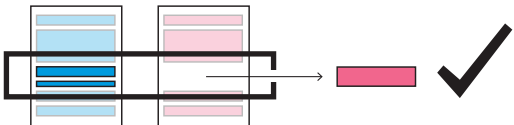


If the chambers don’t approve the other’s amendments, a conference committee is assembled.

Conferees are appointed from committees in each chamber with jurisdiction over the bill, usually seven to 11 conferees each, or more in the case of appropriations or budget reconciliation measures. Conferees will begin informal negotiations and formal meetings to come to a compromise between the differing proposals.



The committee may not add new line items or remove anything that both chambers have already approved. It may only address sections that one chamber has approved, but the other has not.



The committee can suggest that the House or Senate **recede from some or all amendments**. If no agreement is reached, which rarely happens, the chambers can initiate an amendment exchange — if they haven’t already done so.

If the committee determines its solution will draw majority support in each chamber, it will write out the proposal in a conference report, including a section-by-section explanation of the agreement, that must be signed by a majority of Senate and House conferees.



The conference report is then taken up for a vote in one chamber. It may be considered under each chamber’s regular legislative procedure, but may not be amended. If it passes, it is sent to the other chamber for approval.



If neither chamber makes changes to the report, it is sent to the president.

Senate procedure allows striking out portions that are considered under its rules to be “out of scope material” or “new directed spending provisions.”

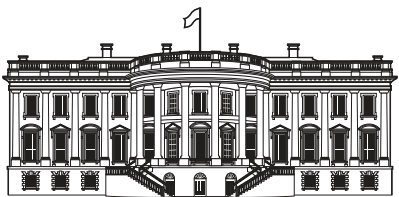
House procedure allows rejecting provisions that would not have been germane to the bill had they originated in the House.

OR

If the conference report passes in both chambers, but excludes some portions according to those rules, the House or Senate can dispose of any remaining amendments where there is not agreement so that both texts are identical.



It is then sent to the president for signature.



Sources: U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate and Congressional Research Service

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